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Operational

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ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations Jena takes care of business



Quiet does not settle here.

The busy LaSalle U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Processing Center opened in the fall of 2007. Located in Jena, Louisiana, a town that covers about five square miles, it functions as an ICE-dedicated detention center with a maximum capacity of 1,320 beds.

"The population here is constant and work is constant," said John Hartnett, ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations assistant field office director. "We arrest an average of 125 people a month."

"We see every kind of case and scenario you can imagine: U.S. citizen claims, visa waiver removals, reinstatements, administrative removal cases, crewman removals, federal district court ordered removals, assumed identity and impostor cases, and all types of situations and scenarios."

Hartnett takes a common sense approach to his duties at LaSalle, "With a large detained population like we have at LaSalle, the health, safety and well-being of the detainees is the priority," said Hartnett. "After that, we ensure facility compliance, transportation services and detainee interaction as required by all relevant policies and detention standards."

When the facility was built, it included a unique administrative annex of five courtrooms. The Department of Justice's Executive Office for Immigration Review uses the courtrooms to adjudicate immigration cases. Until recently, they had only done so remotely, via video transmission; but, since spring of 2017, and for the first time since LaSalle was built, immigration judges now preside over the courtrooms in person at LaSalle.

The recent surge in court activity places new administrative burdens on the ICE staff at LaSalle, but Enforcement and Removal Operations Jena personnel effectively coordinate the additional workload.

"The presence of the courtrooms at LaSalle has required a high level of coordination from ICE," said Hartnett, "but the transition was nearly flawless and has been extremely successful."

As part of the intake process at ICE facilities, detainees receive a complete health assessment within days of entry into the system. In one case, ICE Health Service Corps at LaSalle examined a detainee for a routine tuberculosis screening and discovered a heart aneurism.

"He was taken to a specialist, underwent emergency surgery, and his life was saved," said Hartnett. "If the ICE Health Service Corps had not been here, he could have easily passed away at any given moment."

"It saves lives to have them here on site."

The Corps staff includes a doctor, nurses, nurse practitioners, psychiatrist, dentist, pharmacist, and a clinical social worker.

Enforcement and Removal Operations Jena personnel work in tandem with the Adams County Correctional Center in Natchez, Mississippi, a 90-minute drive away, as part of the Federal Institutional Hearing and Removal Program. ICE personnel arrest and receive approximately 100-140 removable aliens from the facility each month. Deportation officers at LaSalle prepare case paperwork in advance of the many arrivals each day from the prison. Upon their arrival at LaSalle, inmate processing includes fingerprinting and preparation for removal.

ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations Field Office Director, New Orleans, David D. Rivera recognizes the contribution of ICE employees at LaSalle: "The ERO Jena staff performs exceptionally in executing ICE's mission. Their incredible enforcement accomplishments directly and significantly benefit the community by identifying, locating, apprehending, prosecuting, and removing priority targets from the United States. The great work being done at the LaSalle ICE Processing Center is second to none and is a critical part of the ICE New Orleans Field Office's continued success."

The LaSalle team earned recognition from ICE leadership in 2015 for "Outstanding Collaborative Effort" in the way they handled a mass influx of early releases from Adams County Correctional Center. Pursuant to United States Sentencing Commission Amendment 782, over 1,300 foreign born inmates were released from the Bureau of Prisons nationwide on October 30, 2015. Of those released, 240 were received into ICE custody at LaSalle and processed in advance by ICE.

Quincy R. Hodges III, supervisory detention and deportation officer, recognizes the challenges of the diverse enforcement and removal environment at LaSalle, "We deal with a wide variety of issues, from the coordination of removal flights, to consulate interviews with various countries in conjunction with the in-house immigration courts, to coordinating detainee transfers and transportation among the five state field offices; all those things in one location make our office unique."

In addition to Adams, calls from other prisons and jails in 21 parishes throughout Louisiana are received and screened by ICE deportation officers at LaSalle. Reasons for the calls include, advance notice of alien release from custody, information about arrests, deportation proceedings, probation or parole.

Women and men, and both violent and non-violent offenders make up the large population of detainees at LaSalle.

“We have challenges, but are open-minded to ways to improve, adapt, become more efficient and provide transparency whenever possible,” said Hartnett.

Longtime employee Hodges shared Hartnett’s positive attitude. “It’s challenging to cover so many programs and to be required to know all the detention standards and immigration policies, but that is what I like about working here,” he said.

“Each day is different and brings a new challenge.”

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